Deer Management Plan (DMP) – Rosarie and Greenhills Forest

Background

* This DMP should be used as a supporting document/annex for the Land Management Plan (LMP). The DMP should also be used in conjunction with FLS Deer Management Strategy.

National & Local objectives

* Contributing to [Scottish Forestry - Forestry Strategy](https://forestry.gov.scot/forestry-strategy) (also includes Climate Change)
* Deer Management Strategy [Deer management strategy - Forestry and Land Scotland](https://forestryandland.gov.scot/what-we-do/who-we-are/corporate-information/deer-management-strategy?highlight=deer%20strategy)
* Scottish Biodiversity Strategy [Biodiversity strategy: consultation - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-biodiversity-strategy-consultation/)

Rosarie and Greenhills are situated west of the town of Keith in Morayshire. The Land Management Plan area covers 1160 hectares.

The forest is situated in an area dominated by agriculture but with within a relatively dense cluster of forested areas covering much of the higher ground in eastern Moray. Hill of Towie, adjacent to the forest, is an open moor with a windfarm situated on the summit. The Spey valley is located roughly four miles to the west.

Parts of the LMP area have a long history of forestry and appear on first edition Ordnance Survey maps as being afforested. The rest of the forested area was largely established in the post war period of the 1950’s with two areas of new forest, Broadfield and Curlusk, established in 2017 and 2019 respectively.

What are we going to protect?

* To achieve less than 10% damage to leaders on all commercial restocks.
* Enable a wider diverse range of tree species to be planted successfully within the existing Forest area.
* Reduce the deer population across the Forest to less than 5 Deer/km2.
* Control other herbivores within the LMP area and across the wider LMP area to allow the FLS target of less than 10% damage to leader shoots to be achieved.

Deer Species (and other herbivores)

* Roe Deer are the predominant deer species in this area.
* The most recent EDU population assessment in 2022 gives an estimated density of 36.4 deer/km2.-However this was a combined survey result covering a far wider area and should be considered. Evidence on the ground and recent drone surveys conducted suggest a far lower population within the LMP area.
* There is a level of recruitment into the LMP area from both ingress from neighboring land holdings.

What have we done to date?

Deer culls from Rosarie and Greenhills:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Year** | **Roe** | **Total** |
| 24-25 | 120 | 120 |
| 23-24 | 95 | 95 |
| 22-23 | 75 | 75 |
| 21-22 | 58 | 58 |
| 20-21 | 54 + I red | 55 |

The culls have been delivered using an FLS ranger resource primarily.

**Impacts**: the results from 19/20-22 suggest an average of 15.2 % damage on commercial crop. With the increased culls delivered this % will decrease in the future.

**Fencing:** Rosarie and Greenhills had a perimeter stock fence. There is a small, deer fenced enclosure on the Southwest end of the forest which was planted as a test plot for various broadleaves.

Have an evidence-based approach?

Cull setting within this LMP is challenging, due in principle to the ingress from adjoining land.

FLS uses an information-based decision-making process to set its deer management operations with the data received from various internal and external reports which can include.

* Thermal drone counts
* Herbivore dung counts
* Historical cull data
* Sighting data
* Ranger daily/monthly reports
* Deer Management Contractor daily/monthly reports
* Strath Caulaidh Survey data, independently obtained – i.e., Deer density figure, impacts - NN/HIA, SDA, etc.
* All data obtained is then applied to a population model which is used to help set the correct cull.

Link to Deer Dashboard

* Data used to create this DMP can be found in the FLS Deer Dashboard.

Population Modeling and Future Culls

* A cull of 120 deer from Rosarie and Greenhills has been set for 25-26. This figure is a result of looking at survey information, population modelling and considering local deer movements and the forest plans.
* The cull set will be challenging to reach and a programme to open up access-rides and open space must be planned and delivered, to allow future culls to be met providing the crop protection required.
* There is a substantial transient deer population which must be taken into consideration when both setting and delivering culls.

Protection Options – cull/fence/tubes

* Intensive Culling will continue across the LMP to continue to reduce the background deer population and target sensitive areas.

How will objectives be met

The Rosarie LMP area will be managed by a using the Wildlife Ranger staff and Deer Management Contract staff if required.

* All controllers are qualified to Deer Stalking Certificate levels 1 & 2. They also undertake an annual firearms skills test, ensuring the highest levels of safety and competency when undertaking their duties.
* Deer management contractors are a vital resource in FLS’ s deer management toolbox which are selected after satisfying FLS of their competence via a competitive tender. All Deer Management Contractors must meet the FLS standards of health and safety, compliance and be trained to the level of deer management like that of the FLS wildlife staff.
* Out of season shooting is an essential tool in the protection of vulnerable tree crops and natural habitats. This is conducted either under the General License issued by NatureScot for enclosed woodland or by 5(6) authorisations on application to NatureScot for un-enclosed woodland. Male deer of all species will be culled through the 12 months of the year on FLS land. Females will be culled under license from the 1st of September to the 31st of March When early out of season culling of females is conducted any dependent young will be culled first.
* Night shooting is permitted by the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996 as amended by the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act 2011 (WANE Act), under section 18(2) authorizations granted by NatureScot. All operations will conform to current Best Practice Guidance and a copy of the guides will be issued to Wildlife Rangers and Contractors, as necessary. Night shooting is a valuable tool in areas of high deer management pressure where the population has become wise to deer management practices.

Roads/ATV tracks/glades/larders/equipment

* Infrastructure and access within the LMP area is well developed but proves challenging to maintain and keep clear due to a combination of track side vegetation and considerable regen. Flailing of the road’s edge can also increase visibility of deer and vegetation clearance that coincides with Civils Road maintenance programs will be explored.
* Open areas, green ride networks have grown over with regen in recent years which has led to less open areas to shoot deer. This has been mainly due to the lack of resource (In particular the availability of hand cutters), however, the future plans for this LMP area will require a more robust focus to ensure an infrastructure maintenance program is in place and delivered and ongoing which will restore open areas and create shooting opportunities.
* New infrastructure is planned and installed at the restock stage and foresters consult with the wildlife team to decide the best location for access tracks. This provides an opportunity for improving culling infrastructure surrounding the vulnerable areas enabling more effective crop protection to be conducted.

All FLS Wildlife Rangers have the following kit as standard:

* 4 x 4 vehicle with either a winch or loading crane attached to the back to aid in loading carcasses safely.
* Capstan which and rope to aid in extraction when far away from roads.
* 4 x 4 ATV with winch.
* Trailer to transport ATV.
* Slee Sledge/hill trailer to aid in extraction using the ATV.
* .270 caliber rifles
* Binoculars.
* Handheld thermal imager to increase herbivore detection.
* Various knives, saws, and PPE.
* Access to thermal drone and pilot.

The main Deer Larder for the Rosarie and Greenhills LMP area is situated at Balnacoul, the larder has recently been upgraded.

Venison

* FLS subscribe to the Scottish Quality Wild Venison (SQWV) scheme. This sets the standards for our larders and actions of our staff and contractors to ensure we provide a safe food item for the market.
* All venison is quality assured and sold to Highland Game where it is further processed.
* All waste from the larders is removed by a licensed waste disposal contractor.
* All animal by-products are sold to Highland Game along with the venison.